

[‘Bringing harvest to the community’: Shelburne Falls Community Orchard on the move](#)

By [VIRGINIA RAY](#), [For the Recorder](#) Published: 04-15-2024 11:47 AM

Though her original idea to start a small community orchard at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School doesn’t appear to be in the cards, Julia Godfrey will instead donate and move most of her fruit trees and bushes to the Demonstration Permaculture Forest Garden being planned in the back of Veterans’ Field in Buckland.

Godfrey, who lives on the Buckland side of the Deerfield River on Wilde Road, helped launch the [Shelburne Falls Community Orchard](#) there in spring 2020 in response to town conversations about food insecurity, with plans for 100% of the harvest to feed community members in need. The first trees were planted at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with understory shrubs and bushes going in later that fall.

With grant funding from the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, a group of local volunteers has worked with “nearly 30 fruiting and nitrogen-fixing trees for the canopy, 40 understory bushes, and hundreds of herbaceous plants that provide food, medicine and beauty for people, and habitat for animals, birds, and pollinator insects,” according to Godfrey.

“We were able to create a website last year, and have been continuously adding to plant diversity,” she said. “Although the orchard itself is thriving, it’s been difficult for the project to become an orchard with true public access on private land, and we desire to move it to public land in town where it will be accessible and of benefit to all in need of food, community, and education on permaculture and regenerative land use.”

Although Godfrey had proposed creating a small orchard at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School during a March 25 Selectboard meeting, board members and Town Administrator Terry Nartowicz questioned the proposed placement of the orchard.

Godfrey’s proposal entailed bringing 15 to 20 fruit trees (apple, pear, peach, plum and cherry) and 26 highbush blueberry bushes to the school grounds to be publicly accessible.

When first presented, the Selectboard thought the proposal was to place the orchard on the north side of the school grounds, on town-owned property, where the high water table limits use of that space. However, Godfrey pointed out in subsequent correspondence that the north side of the school is not appropriate for an orchard “because fruit trees don’t like wet feet, and the high water table is not a good place to site an orchard.”

Potentially locating an orchard on the south side of the school brought other concerns, notably that the Shelburne Falls Military Band plays summer concerts there and folks park and sit on the lawn

in front of the bandshell. Other town celebrations are generally held in that area and sixth-grade graduation takes place in the bandshell, too.

“We’re down the rabbit hole,” said Selectboard member Richard “Rick” LaPierre. “When I heard, I said, ‘Oh, my goodness, no.’”

However, the south side land is not owned by the town, but by the Mohawk Trail Regional School District.

Godfrey wrote to the Selectboard that Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School Principal Hayley Gilmore had been supportive of the project, pending proper approval from district and town officials. According to Godfrey, Gilmore’s recommendation was to put the first row of trees 110 feet away from the bandshell to continue to accommodate the sixth-grade graduation, which can attract 300 people.

“Out in the space, it would be hard to imagine larger crowds, and certainly that allowed ample space for military band concert crowds,” Godfrey wrote to the board. “Also a row of trees was planted recently, specifically to prevent cars from parking past the tree line; the orchard would not interfere with parking.”

However, in addition to the concerns about the impact on large events, Robin Pease, Mohawk Trail Regional School District’s director of facilities and transportation, expressed parking concerns as well as those for maintenance and lawn care around the trees.

Based on the various concerns expressed, Godfrey ultimately decided to seek an alternative location, with Buckland’s Demonstration Permaculture Forest Garden providing a solution.

According to Kay Cafasso Parker, director of Sowing Solutions and The Permaculture Place at The Mill at Shelburne Falls, as well as a certified permaculture designer and instructor, the Demonstration Permaculture Forest Garden will be located on town-owned land in the back of Veterans’ Field and the ballpark. The town secured a Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grant in the fall to improve this area. The grant focuses on natural resource conservation, recreation, climate resilience and mitigation.

“At the moment, the fences are being removed and replaced in a better location for the ballfield, the horseshoe game area will be improved, the pavilion will be spruced up with a better roof, the land is going to be improved with plantings and regenerative soil care, and the orchard that was at the Shelburne Falls Community Orchard is moving to this site as a large part of this installation of the edible forest garden,” Cafasso Parker explained.

The orchard group also has been working with local gardeners and the new Village of Flowers project. According to Godfrey, thanks to support from the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, local cultural councils and private donations, the orchard account has more than \$3,000 and “can finance all costs for relocating the orchard and early maintenance.”

“We hope that the orchard will contribute to a vibrant Shelburne Falls community, which lifts up the health and well-being of all,” Godfrey said. “We seek to build a safe, healthy, ecosystem for fungi, pollinator insects, animals, and people, made possible through organic growing practices.

“It will mean both bringing community to the harvest and bringing harvest to the community so that neighbors can pick what they need or harvest to share with others,” she continued. “We hope to foster community connections, as well as to help neighbors reconnect with the plants, trees and soil. We hope that our humble orchard project supports the larger goal to contribute to the evolution of our place and to guarantee its resiliency with the challenges of climate change fast approaching.”

Source: <https://www.recorder.com/-Bringing-harvest-to-the-community-Shelburne-Falls-Community-Orchard-on-the-move-54678911>